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# Casey set back the CIA . . .

By Robert A. Rankin

Inquirer Editorial Board

A certain irony attends the resignation of William J. Casey as director of the Central Intelligence Agency, for under him the CIA effectively has come full circle.

When he took charge six years ago, Casey knew precisely what he wanted to do. He intended to restore the CIA to robust vitality after years of what he considered debilitating restrictions imposed upon it in the late 1970s, following revelations of earlier CIA abuses of power. And he did that.

Under him CIA budgets reportedly tripled, morale soared, and analyses improved. Secret agents also mounted covert operations in unprecedented numbers, seeking to bend global events to the Reagan administration's will.

Casey became the first CIA chief to hold cabinet status, and he exercised influence over U.S. foreign policy rivaling the secretaries of state and defense. It must have been heady stuff for the gruff old one-time Wall Street lawyer.

His broad grant of authority stemmed of course from his fellow septuagenarian, President Reagan. Both men evidently share a preference for heavy reliance upon the spy agency as a foreign-policy instrument of choice. How much of this springs from Casey's reminiscence of his glory days as a World War II cloak-and-dagger agent for the Office of Strategic Services, the CIA's forerunner, and from Reagan's own cine-

matic-tinged nostalgia for that distant era of near-mythic U.S. supremacy, is a matter ripe for speculative conjecture, but cannot be known definitively.

What is known, unfortunately, is that in escaping the bonds imposed on the CIA in the late 1970s, Casey defiantly practiced the same black arts that persuaded the nation to rein in the CIA back then.

Remember the investigative committee headed by Sen. Frank Church (D., Idaho) in 1975-76? It revealed that the CIA "conducted some 900 major or sensitive covert action projects plus several thousand smaller projects since 1961." And as its final report put it: "Reliance on covert action has been excessive because it offers a secret shortcut around the democratic process. This shortcut has led to questionable foreign involvements and unacceptable acts."

The Church committee recognized that a global superpower's responsibilities require foreign intelligence, spies and secret operations. But it's essential conclusion — one Presidents Ford and Carter, Congress and the nation came to share — was that the vast power entrusted to U.S. intelligence agencies must be accountable to officials who themselves answer to the public. Otherwise, it said, "intelligence activities conducted outside the framework of the Constitution and statutes can undermine the treasured values guaranteed in the Bill of Rights."

In pursuit of that principle, reforms were instituted making the

CIA more formally accountable to both the President and to congressional oversight committees. To his discredit and the nation's misfortune, Casey treated these reforms with contempt.

Congressional overseers routinely complained that he kept them in the dark. The premier example was the CIA's 1984 mining of Nicaragua's port of Corinto, an act of war about which Casey neglected to inform Congress. In the ensuing uproar, Casey vowed always to inform Congress about future covert operations in timely fashion.

Yet disclosures so far in the Iran-cam scandals show that Casey helped orchestrate the plot to keep Congress in the dark about the Iranian arms sales. He also may have kept his peers in the cabinet — perhaps the Oval Office itself? — in the dark as well.

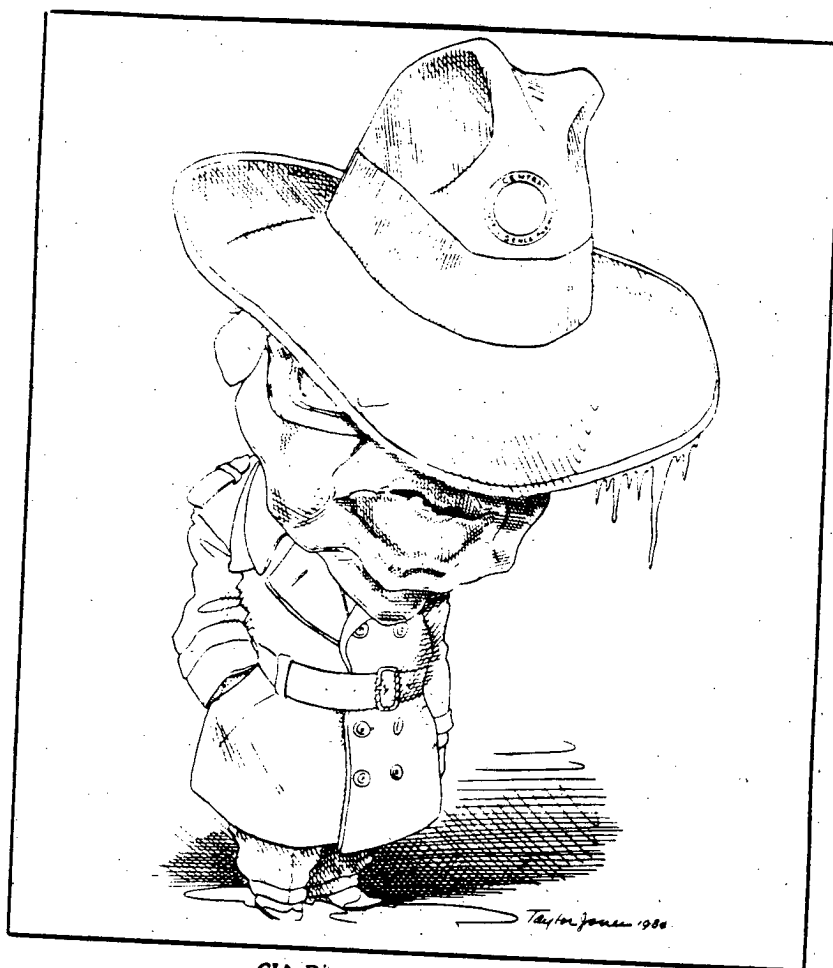
The Senate Intelligence Committee's preliminary report says Casey knew that money from the arms sales was diverted to the contras six weeks before Attorney General Edwin Meese 3d discovered it and told President Reagan.

Casey also reportedly misled Secretary of State George P. Shultz about these capers, with a little help from his friends, such as White House Chief of Staff Donald T. Regan. Meanwhile evidence continues to build indicating that the CIA deliberately defied congressional prohibitions against giving the contras military aid in 1985 and 1986.

This pattern of behavior by Casey is precisely the danger that Church's committee warned Americans against 11 years ago, and justifies anew the imperative to make the CIA truly accountable to Congress.

The best epitaph for William Ca-

sey's reign at the CIA might be a quotation from Justice Louis Brandeis: "The greatest dangers to liberty lurk in the insidious encroachment by men of zeal, well-meaning but without understanding."



CIA Director William Casey